

Talking points for the budget hearing for the Montana Arts Council:

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. For the record, I'm Renée Westlake, currently an educator working for Bozeman Public Schools as the fine arts supervisor. I taught music for 26 years: AP music theory, world drumming, band, jazz band, and elementary music in my early years. I'm currently a doctoral student at MSU-Bozeman in Educational Leadership, a past president of the Northwest division of the National Association for Music Education and a past president for the Montana Music Educators Association. I am a volunteer board member for three non-profit arts organizations in Bozeman: the Bozeman Symphony, the Montana Ballet Company, and Arts Without Boundaries. I live on a grain farm about five miles from Bozeman with my husband. We have two adult daughters, both commercial dancers in the Los Angeles area.

The Montana Arts Council has a variety of purposes. As a public school administrator and former teacher, here are the areas of purpose that ring positively to me for our communities and for education. MAC is critical to the arts in my community of Bozeman:

- The Montana Arts Council stays current on the latest research, trends and opportunities in music, visual art, drama and dance.
- MAC's Artists-in-Schools and Communities program reaches communities, teachers and students in areas of our rural state in order to bring rigor and relevance to culture and history through the arts.
- MAC funds and keeps afloat arts non-profit organizations through grants, grants that ensure the innovative and creative progress that attracts progressive and intelligent families to an area.

Risk takers such as Senator Llew Jones are asking our state to raise the bar, set high standards, find ways to improve that which can be measured, and empower professionals who care with the tools to improve student achievement.

Let's look at student achievement in Bozeman. Did you know that 10% of all Bozeman High School students in the past year have a 4.0 Grade Point Average? Of that 10%, did you know that 63% of those with a 4.0 are enrolled in music, art, drama or dance classes? The average GPA at Bozeman High is 3.05, pretty high for a high school. If you are in ANY music class, your average GPA is 3.52 and if you are in the top band, choir or orchestra your average GPA is 3.74. Did you know that, for the past 5 years of graduating classes, 70% or higher of the students who are National Merit Finalists have taken all four years of music, art, drama or dance? Of the 50 Worthy Student Scholarship recipients each year, a scholarship that honors citizenship and service, over half of the recipients each year are strong arts students?

The common core documents contain items called "portraits", a snapshot of what ideal achievement looks like. These portraits are chocked full of 21st century skills, a set of attributes presented by "Partners in Education Transformation" and backed by Cisco, Intel and Microsoft. Two rigorous expansions have been published in the past four years, one called "21st Century Skills - An Arts Map" targeting the study of music, art, drama and dance to improve the skills needed to be college, career and community ready upon graduation. The other outgrowth of the Common Core is

"P21 Common Core Tool Kit", a how-to guide to improving achievement and citizenship through the development of 21st century skills: creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, communication, collaboration, research, inquiry, flexibility, adaptability, initiative, self-direction, productivity, leadership and responsibility. Spend one week in a well-taught arts class and you will see that those mentioned skills are basically a syllabus for an arts class.

The Montana Arts Council is on the cutting edge of progressive community growth. Arts are one of the most public displays of a healthy community. Bozeman is proud of our Symphony Orchestra, Opera Association and Ballet Company. Those non-profits fund about 35-40% of their operating costs with ticket sales. The rest of their ability to take creativity and innovation to the next level comes from grants and donations. Even in a down economy, our community – not unlike each community in Montana – thrives through the culture experienced through the arts.

The Montana Arts Council is a responsible organization that often wisely uses funds to create more funds for a healthy arts community. A healthy arts community means a thriving and healthy town or city.

I would like to leave you with the stories of two wonderful Bozeman High graduates, Nicole and Travis. Nicole graduated in 2006, has a bachelors and a masters degree in engineering, and is one of the top engineers for Boeing. She was a 4.0 student, a varsity soccer player, and an All-State flute player. Music served her as her focusing agent. You simply cannot play with beautiful phrasing, in tune, blending with the other instruments, and portraying the mood or story of the composer without focus. Lastly, meet Travis, from the class of '96, who spent most of his upper elementary and middle school years in the ISS or in-school suspension room for troublesome behavior. He struggled with reading and math, received special education services, and was a classic personality for dropping out of school. But he loved art and band. In his high school years, he came to school so he wouldn't miss those two classes. And he learned to read. And he learned to do math. Travis is now a productive citizen, who holds a job, treats his family well, and advocates for good education for his own kids. The arts saved him. And they focused Nicole.

The Montana Arts Council brings programs like the Artists in Schools and Communities programs to our Montana communities. They find the most current research on communities and the arts. They support the non-profit arts organizations that change and improve communities. Please make an investment in community, in education, and in the arts by supporting the critical work that the MAC does. Thank you for your time.